DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 390 111 EA 026 884

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TITLE Generating Recommendations To Support Sustainable School Development.
INSTITUTION New South Wales Dept. of School Education, Sydney (Australia).
PUB DATE Dec 93
NOTE 13p.; Paper presented at the Quality Assurance Statewide Meeting (Sydney, New South Wales, Australia, December 1993).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Advisory Committees; *Educational Assessment; *Educational Improvement; Educational Objectives; Educational Quality; Elementary Secondary Education; Evaluation Criteria; *Guidelines; *Organizational Change; Performance; *School Effectiveness
IDENTIFIERS *Australia (New South Wales)

ABSTRACT

The school-review process in New South Wales (Australia) serves an accountability function to inform communities and the New South Wales Department of School Education about the success of school programs and to support schools in their efforts to improve student learning. This paper focuses on the school-development function of reviews. In particular, it explores some aspects of school improvement: the meaning of school change and school development; the types of change that are desirable and possible; ways to frame recommendations for school improvement; and guidelines for a good set of recommendations. The outcome of a school review is judged to a large extent by the set of recommendations generated by the school-review team and the extent to which it induces debate and school-improvement action. Recommendations for change should consider the school's current stage of development and its capacity to respond to the proposed change, set clear goals to achieve outcomes, and be of strategic importance to the school's development. A matrix for analyzing a set of recommendations for school change is provided. The appendix contains a matrix for evaluating types of change. (Contains 26 references.) (LMI)

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GENERATING RECOMMENDATIONS TO SUPPORT SUSTAINABLE SCHOOL DEVELOPMENT

ED 390 111

A paper to support the development of a framework for the analysis of school review recommendations. Presented at Quality Assurance Statewide Meeting, Sydney, December, 1993.

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GENERATING RECOMMENDATIONS TO SUPPORT SUSTAINABLE SCHOOL DEVELOPMENT

INTRODUCTION

The school review process is designed to serve an accountability function to publicly inform communities and the Department of School Education about the success of school programs and to support schools in their efforts to improve student learning.

This paper focuses on the school development function of reviews. In particular, it attempts to explore some aspects of school improvement — what is meant by school change and school development, what types of change are possible and desirable, how do we frame recommendations for school improvement and what is meant by a good set of recommendations? It does not address significant issues relating to school level management of change processes and human resource management strategies.

The success or otherwise of a school review is judged in major part by the set of recommendations generated and the extent to which that induces debate and school improvement action.

It is critical therefore, that we have an appreciation of school level change and how it is sustained so that a set of recommendations does become a catalyst for desirable development. The challenge for the school review process is to significantly influence desirable school change and not be seen as an exercise to be endured once every four years which results in superficial adaptation ie. compliance with expectations in the short term, followed by reversion to old practices, because basic values and beliefs have not changed.

WHAT IS CHANGE?

For decades, philosophers and researchers have struggled with definitions of *change'* in relation to organisations.

The pioneering work of Lewin in the 1940's envisaged planned organisational change in three stages — unfreezing, changing and refreezing. This approach to planned change assumes that organisations are rather static and predictable units and individuals within them are readily compliant. Modern organisations are anything but static and frozen and individuals are generally not prone to be mindlessly compliant. Organisational change is no longer viewed in Lewin's terms.

Recent writers stress the ubiquitous and multidirectional nature of organisational change. Eccles and Nohria (1992) speak of the *fluid* motion of complex organisations and see planned change as the identification of some aspect of the motion and redirecting it by creating conditions that facilitate reorientation, alter relationships and responsibilities.

Moss Kanter *et al* (1992) use a similar metaphor — organisational movement. They see organisations as constantly moving. In a stable organisation, where there is a coalition of interests and activities, the motion is smooth. However, when there is movement in an organisation's environment, internal structures or governance arrangements, real change occurs since the coalition is altered.

Fullan (1991) makes a distinction between the objective and subjective reality of change. Objectively, change is multi-dimensional and we can clarify it by identifying and describing its separate dimensions. Subjectively, individuals define change proposals according to their own or their group's reality. Fullan believes that the essence of change is the transformation of subjective realities—changing what people believe, think and do.

In brief, the current view of change in complex organisations is that it is multi-dimensional and there is a dynamic interrelationship between the dimensions.

TYPES OF CHANGE

Watzlawick, Weakland and Fisch (1974) first categorised change as being either of the first or second order. Cuban (1989) used this framework to examine change in schools and the conditions under which it occurs.

First order change involves the rearrangement of parts of an existing system without disturbing the basic values or structures. Cuban believes that it may achieve some illusions of basic change that may not be sustained.

Second order change requires a change in values, beliefs, the of tasks and relationships, setting new goals and objectives. This requires members of an organisation to transcend their present frame of reference.

Cuban makes the point that first order change is not necessarily bad and second order change good. It is however, important to distinguish between the two types of change. In some settings, first order change might be appropriate; in other settings, less so. Other writers disagree with Cuban. They view first order change as unsustainable and label it cosmetic or temporary (Moss Kanter *et al*,1992).

Fullan (1991) refers to surface change and real change. It is possible to change on the surface by endorsing certain goals and imitating desired behaviours but not understand the principles and rationale of change.

Moreover, it is possible to be articulate about the goals of the change without understanding their implications for practice. Real change involves changes in values, conceptions and role behaviour. Joyce and Showers (1988) make a similar point. Change involves changes in skills, practice and theory or conceptions.

The dual cátegorisation of change types is supported by Dalmau and Dick (1985) who distinguished between incremental change and radical change. They see incremental change as essentially maintaining an organisation in its existing state by finding new ways of expressing established goals. However, radical change touches the organisation's very nature and develops new beliefs, new goals, different roles and norms.

Moss Kanter *et al* (1992) speak of Capital C change and small c change. For them Capital C change requires a change in an organisation's character which refers to its structure, systems and culture. Small c change involves no change in patterned behaviours in an organisation and they describe it as cosmetic and temporary. They admit that an accumulation of small c changes can be perceived as Capital C change.

The term *transformation* is used by Morgan (1986) in a similar way to Moss Kanter's Capital C change. He uses the metaphor of the organisation as a flow and transformation to show that organisations do not only maintain themselves by means of adjustments, but also by self-renewal and self-reproduction. This view aligns with the now commonly used term *learning organisations* which are geared to generate new knowledge, expertise and skills in order to anticipate and deal with changing external circumstances.

Joyce *et al* (1993) also use a dual categorization for change in schools—*mild change* and *strong change*. They suggest that many ideas for change in schools are stillborn for a number of reasons, one significant reason being a belief that school personnel can make only mild change at best. *Strong* change creates discomfort because it involves changing behaviour and attitudes.

There seems to be a general trend to see organisational change in two broad categories — second order, Capital C, transformational or real change and first order, small c, incremental or cosmetic/temporary change.

Our current knowledge of organisational character and of how to modify it, suggests that second order or Capital C change is likely to endure. What is less clear is the value of first order or small c changes in terms of their aggregation into sustainable change which alters aspects of the character of an organisation. The available evidence suggests that a Capital C change can be broken down into a number of small c changes for purposes of implementation and may be successful in changing fundamental features if the organisation keeps the ultimate goal in focus and carefully monitors the timely implementation of the components (Hall & Hord, 1987; Fullan, 1991).

Cuban (1990) and Fullan (1991) argue that a multitude of small c changes may give members of an organisation a feeling of being inundated by an impossible array of demands and they may end up feeling frustrated and alienated. It is suggested that doing fewer things well and ensuring that change initiatives are integrated[1] will help gain members' support and energy. This evidence has important implications for school review processes. What criteria should be used to determine the number and type of recommendations?

FRAMING RECOMMENDATIONS – PROCESS SKILLS

The methodology used in the school review process is basically a content analysis[2] — using the raw data (words) to construct meaning, after conceptualising categories to classify information, and analysing and synthesising this so that the review team reaches a consensus about the information, gaps in the information and what meaning is constructed for a particular school.

Once this is done, the team engages in a reflection process aimed at generating recommendations for school improvement. This reflection process attempts to bridge the gap between *what is* and *what could be* using a framework of best practice as a referent.

The reflection process requires skills different from those used in traditional methods of study and learning. Boud *et al* (1985) believe that reflection includes four critical components which all improve with practice — *association* (relating new data to what is already known); *integration* (seeking relationships among the data); *validation* (determining authenticity of ideas and feelings); and *appropriation* (making new knowledge one's own).

In engaging in these activities, Boud *et al* (1985) suggest that three rules are required to assure the accuracy of problem identification and the utility of solutions or actions. First, focus on the raw data while trying to remain free of judgment and avoid premature closure. Second, attend to our own feelings and prevent them from becoming barriers to learning about the review school and third, revisit or re-evaluate to prevent the omission of small but possibly vital issues.

Hart (1993) provides further useful guidelines to improve practice in problem solving and reflection. She stresses the need to guard against *pseudodiagnosticity* (seeking data that will not be helpful), *anchoring* (lack of

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[1] One small c change in curriculum might require simultaneous small c changes in instructional techniques, technology and cooperative effort. A planned integrated approach will be required to implement all four changes.

[2] See Krippendorff (1980) and Ashworth (1987) who place qualitative research within the theory of interpretation.

attention to information which is inconsistent with initial thinking), *unwarranted conclusions* (inadequate synthesis) and *incorrect conclusions* (incorrect synthesis).

There is a significant body of research which supports the view that the quality of reflection and the skills required, improve with practice (Schon, 1987; Pearson, Hansen and Gordon 1979).

SCHOOL DEVELOPMENT

Approaches to school development have changed significantly over the last decade as a consequence of both school effectiveness and school improvement research and practitioners' views of school development. The current widely held beliefs about school improvement are encapsulated in the definition used by Van Velzen (1985) for the International School Improvement Project (I.S.I.P.):

> School Improvement is a systematic, sustained effort aimed at change in learning conditions and other related internal conditions ... with the ultimate aim of accomplishing educational goals more effectively. (p48)

Knowledge generated from this project suggests that school change is facilitated by the following.

- The whole school is the focus of change ie. a "classroom exceeding" perspective is adopted, without ignoring the classroom.
- Change is a carefully planned and managed process which occurs over a number of years.
- Key foci for change are the schools' internal conditions ie. teaching–learning activities, organisational structures, procedures, roles, resources.
- All stakeholders work collaboratively and symbiotically and are committed to the improvement goals.
- Improvement strategies link top-down effort and bottom-up diagnosis, strategic choice and implementation.
- Successful change is recognised when behaviour changes are institutionalised. (Adapted from Hopkins, 1987)

Further knowledge about change in schools has been provided by Fink and Stoll (1993). They report that factors accounting for sustainable change include shared values and beliefs, a school climate characterised by trust, openness and receptivity to growth and a collaborative culture. They suggest that if these conditions do not exist, change will be temporary. They also note that experience teaches us that discrete innovations do not occur in schools.

The reality is that multiple changes are integrated. This supports the multi-dimensional nature of change referred to earlier.

Fink and Stoll confirm the earlier findings of Reynolds (1991) that change in schools is anything but a rational process. Staff culture can exhibit a non-rational quality, eg. practices which are shown by research to be better than existing practices can be blocked by staff. It is clear that critical pre-conditions need to exist if sustainable change is to occur, eg. collaborative culture, conflict resolution skills, negotiation skills, decision making skills. If these conditions do not exist, development plans may be subverted or circumvented.

Clearly this knowledge has implications for all aspects of the school review process. In particular, it suggests some guidelines which need to be observed when generating recommendations for a particular school.

- The school's unique circumstances and its readiness for change need to be appreciated. The pre-conditions already referred to might be the substance of review recommendations.
- The school as an organisation is the focus of development.
- The multi-dimensional nature of change and the interrelationships within schools mean that change recommendations may have implications for all stakeholders, although this is not always immediately evident.

GENERATING RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SCHOOL DEVELOPMENT

A recommendation in a school review report is a statement designed to guide action by a school community or section of the community to improve some aspect of a school's operation, condition or outcomes. In the context of supporting sustainable school development, the following conditions need to be met when generating change recommendations.

- Recommendations must take account of the school's current stage of development and its capacity to respond to the proposed change.

This condition acknowledges that change needs to be carefully planned and managed and the school's readiness for change has been considered. Successful change requires a careful balancing of change forces and continuity forces. Drucker (1985) reminds us that the forces supporting continuity can subvert change, but also that chaos can abort change efforts.

- Recommendations need to embody desired better conditions or outcomes and not simply suggest activity.

This condition highlights the need for setting clear outcome goals. The strategies for reaching these goals should be left to the school to determine.

- Recommendations need to be of strategic importance to the school's development.

In many evaluation reforms schools have not been fertile ground for change, whether driven from within or without (Cuban, 1990; Sarason, 1990; Miles, 1992). Joyce et al (1993) suggest that because of this poor record a *toe-in-the-water* approach or an implicit policy of gradualism has developed, change initiatives have been tentative and they have dissipated into nothingness during the implementation process. Well supported second order changes may result in more successful implementation and sustainable development than first order change.

Where a recommendation which is of strategic dimensions is translated by a school community into a manageable number of *small c* changes for implementation it is important to ensure that the *big picture* is not lost.

ANALYSIS OF A SET OF RECOMMENDATIONS

As recommendations from a school review are being generated, it is suggested that review teams use a framework or some specified criteria to ensure that the set of recommendations is challenging for the school, yet achievable.

The following matrix provides a framework which considers types of change and the domains of change.

	Domain		
ChangeTypes	Teaching & Learning	Governance & Management	Culture & Leadership
First order or small c			
Second order or Capital C			

Note

(i) A recommendation that a school community engage in an in-depth evaluation can be classified within this framework, if we know whether the evaluation relates to a small c or Capital C change.

(ii) The domains of change have been determined by reference to the Quality Assurance Directorate's framework for best practice.

T & L: Teaching and learning—content or substance of curriculum, instruction or technology.

G & M: Governance and management—mobilisation of the school community for collaborative effort and shared understandings.

C & L: Cultural dimensions and leadership—values, beliefs, relationships and the development of a learning or self-renewing organisation.

(iii) A more detailed matrix is provided in the Appendix.

Some examples of first order or small c change are adding to or altering existing programs, better resource distributions, improving consultative processes, enhancing skills, refining existing strategies to achieve desired

outcomes, developing understandings and generating wider commitment, affirming and extending existing arrangements.

Second order or Capital C changes relate to changing values and beliefs, significantly altering structures, roles and relationships, introducing new roles, setting new strategic goals, restructuring a school or a unit within a school, etc.

It can be argued that a set of recommendations that has no second order change will not stretch a school's performance over the next 3–4 years. Slater and Teddlie (1992) postulate that schools are entropic in nature and if members are not consciously trying to improve a school, it will tend, slowly or quickly, to become less effective.

Only a review team which has generated a comprehensive portrait of a particular school can determine appropriate recommendations and the mix of first and second order changes. It is also noted that in some review areas, it is not possible to make a firm recommendation for school development. In these circumstances, a recommendation for an in-depth evaluation is appropriate providing it is within the capacity and resources of the school.

The extent to which the set of recommendations covers the three domains is related to the focus areas of the review, although the use of open–ended questions and exploratory questions may result in recommendations which cover all domains.

It is clear from both field experience and the literature cited that there are critical pre-conditions that need to exist in schools if any school improvement effort is to be sustained. These conditions are essentially about school culture and changing culture is second order change. It is, therefore, essential for school reviews to take this into account. If the pre-conditions for sustainable change are not present, it is clear that they are of necessity a high priority for a recommendation for development. Once the pre-conditions exist and schools have an improvement culture, sustained growth is possible.[3] In how many reviews have we really assessed these pre-conditions? How many of our recommendations are likely to result in sustainable school development?

In one sense, once an improvement culture is present and a set of recommendations has been developed, the real challenge begins. Theory and practice tell us that processes of implementation and institutionalisation of change are never easy. Fullan (1991) sums it up well when he stresses the need to practice change by developing a healthy respect for and mastery of the change process.

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[3] It is possible to map on organization's culture to determine if conditions to support desirable change are present e.g. HRM Consulting (NSW) Pty. Ltd. "Mapping the Culture of An Organization", Workshop Materials.

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APPENDIX I

Analysis of Recommendations

The following matrix provides a framework which considers types of change, the domain of change and areas for in-depth evaluation.

Change Types	Domain: Teaching & Learning	Domain: Governance & Management	Domain: Culture & Leadership
First order change			
Extension of existing program			
Improved effectiveness of existing program			
Improved participation in existing program			
Improved outcomes of existing program			
In-depth evaluation to effect a small c change			
Second order Change			
Changing structures, systems			
Altering values, beliefs			
New roles			
New program, new goals			
New skills, new practices			
In-depth evaluation to effect a Change.			